CHAPTER EIGHT

TAKING STOCK

The main argument of this book is that vocatives are syntactic items computed in narrow syntax. The evidence provided in this respect came from constraints that were shown to apply in the derivation of the vocative constituents (its internal structure) and in the way the vocative constituent relates to the clause (the external licensing). In particular, the manipulation of definite articles, augments, type of Vocative Particles, or similar grammaticalization strategies in a number of unrelated languages indicated a systematic pattern by which the vocative noun is embedded under a functional field (i.e., the vocative phrase—VocP) to which features concerning the addressee semantics are mapped. VocP relates to the clause through the intermediary of functional heads that map the illocutionary force intrinsic to direct addresses.

The book was thus focused on the syntax of direct addresses, and treated the vocatives as a subset of this type of speech acts. Chapter 1 provided the information on how direct addresses are singled out from the wider umbrella of speech acts (e.g., by establishing the distinction between addresses and exclamations).

The syntactic approach to vocatives took as the starting point the cartographic representation of speech acts (saP) in Speas & Tenny (2003), together with their justification for the mapping of conversational pragmatics in general. This apparatus has been instrumental for sorting out the mechanism through which VocP relates to the clause, although, for doing that, we had to bring some important amendments to the organization of saP. That is, we adopted the idea that the conversational pragmatic field is organized over two shells—one for the speaker (SAsP), one for the hearer (SAhP)—the latter being relevant to direct addresses. We expanded the structure, because speech act particles for direct address, which merge in the SAh head, brought evidence for two fields within the hearer shell: SAhP, mapping the argumental structure; and sahP, mapping discourse features.

As for the internal structure of VocP, we proceeded on the basis of generally assumed operations that derive DPs, and proposed the extension of the functional field. Thus, a vocative noun is defined as a noun that projects to VocP.
In a nutshell, we argued that a VocP field is universally present in the structure of vocatives, irrespective of whether VocP is lexically visible or not. That is, Umbundu, where Vocº is obligatorily lexical (i.e., the Vocative Particle is obligatory), and English, where VocP may often be non-lexical, have the same underlying structure for their vocative constituents. Hence, an important conclusion of this book is in (1).

(1) Any vocative is a Vocative Phrase (VocP)

An important source of intra-language variation within VocP arises from the type of complement Vocº selects: DP or NP. Vocº > NP is more economical, but it restricts the composition of the phrase (e.g., it cannot license possessives or nominalized adjectives). Vocº > DP is the option when more complex vocative constituents are needed. Furthermore, the DP can be phasal or non-phasal (deficient): the former allows for the merging of possessives or definite articles, whereas the latter allows for the vocative use of nominalized adjectives. Hence, the second conclusion of this book is:

(2) Vocatives arise from one of two patterns: Vocº > DP or Vocº > NP

The features mapped to VocP have been identified as being relevant to the address semantics: in particular, the identification of the addressee (2nd person) and the qualification of the relation between speaker and addressee in the conversational set-up (the inter-personal feature). Thus, the third finding of this book is summarized in (3).

(3) The features of Vocº:  

[2nd person] = uninterpretable but valued  
[1-p] = uninterpretable and unvalued

Intra- and cross-linguistic variation stems from (i) the available options for feature checking in VocP (i.e., XP movement, involving DP, NP or AP; head movement; or direct merge of Vocative Particles); and (ii) from morphological variation (e.g., the clitic or non-clitic status of the definite article; the type of Dº marking through article, augments or zero morphemes). The book explored some of this variation in Chapter 4, but the discussion has only opened the path for more in-depth typological studies.

VocP has been analyzed as directly merged in Spec, SAhP, where it checks the [hearer] p-role of the hearer-oriented speech act head (SAh). That is, by adopting Speas & Tenny’s analysis of the speech act predicative structure, we could define VocP as the indirect object of the speech act, and qualify its merge position as argumental. The CP utterance is the direct object of the same head, so VocP relates to the clause insofar as it